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The First Thirty Years

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At the time of this publication, Carolyn Marvin was a PhD candidate at the Institute of Communications Research, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign.

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The First Thirty Years

by Carolyn Marvin and Quentin J. Schultze

Alliances among citizens, the radio manufacturers, and the FCC have shifted with each new compromise on behalf of the "public interest."

The Middle East oil crisis of late 1973 focused the attention of the American public on Citizens' Band radio. Protesting emergency speed limits to conserve the nation's fuel, independent truckers for whom the new rules meant a wage sacrifice used CB radios to coordinate widely televised highway traffic blockades. Soon CB was being depicted by the national media as an "outlaw" frequency band, a technological last frontier for rugged individualists. Nontrucker motorists began buying and using Citizens' Band radio to avoid speed tickets. In an aura of illegality, CB had become a mass consumer product.

In January 1977 the Federal Communications Commission expanded the portion of the spectrum allotted to the Citizens' service from 23 to 40 channels (26.965 MHz to 27.405 MHz), despite increasing demands on spectrum space by all land mobile, amateur, and special non-broadcast services. The expansion is good news for some radio manufacturers seeking to become industry giants, and for giants seeking a new hold on the market.

The FCC has also recently been examining proposals to open a second, complementary Citizens' Band at a higher, more technically suitable frequency (41 Fed. Reg. 32677, [1976]). If the agency is unable to resist a combination of industry and consumer interests, that will be partly due to its own stimulation of the growth of a band that is technically inadequate for the amount and nature of radio traffic in the Citizens' radio service. Overcrowding in the 27 MHz band has created interference that is not confined to the Citizens' service but also affects the lower portion of the television spectrum (41 Fed. Reg. 47445 [1976]), and even the operation of ordinary stereo hi-fi in many urban areas. In this band, perhaps the most serious problem for the long term is cyclical solar interference, which is expected to worsen for some years to come (19).

The recent expansion will surely exacerbate other existing problems, especially unlicensed operation and illegal transmissions, from obscene calls, malicious interference, and advertising to the peddling of narcotics and prostitutes over the air waves. These abuses are not a recent development in the Citizens' Band, but their incidence has mounted drastically with the increase of users. By January 1, 1977, the FCC had licensed 7,668,457 Class D operators.

Official estimates placed the number of unlicensed operators at 10 percent more, but industry sales suggest that the total number of licensed and unlicensed operators is probably at least three times the number of licensees (24).

The Citizens' radio service was one of a number of postwar radio services. Wartime research had increased the useable portion of the radio spectrum about 100 times, and had introduced new technologies like radar and microwave. But until 1945 radio use by the public had been limited to groups directly concerned with protecting property and public safety, and to a few industrial enterprises like bridge construction, oil exploration, and power line maintenance.

With the end of the wartime need to restrict spectrum use to defense, the FCC had a new opportunity to encourage the larger and more effective use of radio in the public interest. The Commission sought technical advice on wider spectrum allocation from the Radio Manufacturers' Association, the principal industry group, which organized a Radio Technical Planning Board to make engineering recommendations to the FCC. When the Commission finally assigned experimental station authorizations in 1945, there was wide industry agreement that RTPB had succeeded in planning frequency allocations and systems standardization in accord with manufacturing interests (23).

Looking ahead to a day when electronics would transform the lives of ordinary citizens, the FCC had pictured a future in which peacetime technology would bring about a utopia of democratic possibilities (7). Public safety was no longer the only priority for postwar radio. The FCC hoped that the operational experience of the experimental stations would provide a basis for developing policies to stimulate and weigh broad claims on national radio resources by a diversified citizenry. Railroad, utility, relay press service, urban and highway mobile services, state guard services, services for geological survey work and motion picture filming were all soon established. In 1945, five station authorizations also were granted to develop equipment in the 460-470 MHz range for a Citizens' radio service. This decision grew out of a suggestion by Motorola vice president Daniel Noble, who foresaw a market for an inexpensive, short-range, two-way business radio service (17).

The FCC expanded Noble's idea to encompass a "private radio communications service" for which only the simplest grasp of radio technology and regulation would be needed. Station licensees would be "free to use the service for their own purposes" but could make no charge for sending or receiving messages. Room for 1,000 channels was provided (7, 9).

The agency entertained a vast range of possible uses for the Citizens' service. In cars and other places where doctors were away from telephones, it might provide a physicians' calling service. Department stores, dairies, and laundries could communicate with their delivery trucks by its means. Large industrial plants, farms and ranches, harbor and river craft could take advantage of it. In mountain and swamp areas the hazards of hunting, fishing, and hiking would be reduced by the Citizens' service. Communication from construction crew to base, from private aircraft to home, private boat to clubhouse, steeple jack to ground crew, hospital to ambulance, in waterway dredging operations, assembly lines, volunteer fire-fighting, parades, and parking lot operations offered an wide range of possibilities for business and community use (8, 9, 10, 12).

The envisioned image of the individual user was more restricted. The FCC had imagined that individuals who owned planes or yachts, hunted or climbed mountains in their leisure time would all be served by Citizens' radio. No mention was made, however, of the factory worker signaling his wife with a pocket transmitter to put dinner on the table as he boarded a bus home at the end of the day. Nor was there any anticipation of the use of Citizens' radio to coordinate a labor strike. The Commission conceived Citizens' radio as a private service for small businesses and some affluent individuals.

All these options were limited for the first decade by lack of equipment. The Commission had been poorly advised by its industrial experts. Contrary to expectation, equipment for the very high frequencies of the 460-470 MHz band could not easily be adapted from war surplus material or inexpensively manufactured. Sophisticated engineering was necessary in radios operating reliably in this range. Perhaps hastily, since only one manufacturer had been certified by the Commission to make Citizens' radio equipment, the FCC changed the status of Citizens' radio from an experimental to a regular radio service with two classes on June 1, 1949. Class A industrial and public service operators were permitted more powerful transmitters and could broadcast on all 10 MHz. Class B small business and individual operators used less powerful transmitters and confined their operation to the frequencies 462-468 MHz (42 FCC 188 [1949]).

By 1952, the wide usage predicted for Citizens' radio by the FCC had not materialized, since manufacturers could not profitably make the expensive equipment required for it.

Indeed, most license applications requested FCC authorization only for remote control operation of model planes, boats, and garage door openers. The FCC created a new Class C service for remote control and sensibly assigned it to 27.255 MHz, a technically more accessible frequency which licensees shared with ham radio operators who used it for experimental purposes (42 FCC 219 [1952]). Tacked on to the service as an afterthought, this frequency would become the home of the Citizens' Band of the present day.

During the 1950s, the Citizens' service did begin to grow, but mostly among Class A commercial users who could afford to pay more for adequately engineered equipment. By 1958, Motorola, Kaar Engineering, RCA, General Electric, Communications Co., and Royalcall were all producing crystal controlled units for \$500 to \$700 apiece which could be used either in Class A or on nearby land mobile frequencies (21). At mid-decade the FCC reported that the largest group of Citizens' radio users were Class A urban commercial dispatch operations—department store delivery, ice and fuel delivery, heavy construction operations, and television and radio servicing (11). Apart from Class C stations, most of the 18,600 Citizens' stations operating in 1956 were used for business purposes by commercial firms. Only two companies produced for the less wealthy Class B market, and only one of these was still in business by 1957. Even at \$100 a unit, Class B equipment still was not cheap enough for widespread individual use. Since it could not be crystal controlled at this price, it was also markedly unreliable.

A service loosely structured for personal flexibility was now dominated by commercial users and new regulatory problems. Unable to enforce the old rules of the service effectively, the FCC proposed a complete revision in April of 1957 to take account of the majority of licensees. Industry interests like Motorola argued in support of revision that many business communications carried on over Class A and B frequencies with different kinds of equipment could be more efficiently consolidated into one service and technical system (42 FCC 750 [1958]). Although the FCC had declared its chief responsibility was to small business users, larger businesses were the most likely to be diversified and to benefit from economies of consolidation. The Commission proposed tougher technical standards for Class B and abolished a provision limiting eligibility in the service to those who qualified in no other services. The Commission also hinted that it was moving toward "reallocation of the 460-470 MHz band to other important" services (44A FCC 1343 [1958]). Users of the neighboring land mobile services, led by American Telephone and Telegraph, with taxicab and industrial services foiling in behind,

had indeed made many requests to be allowed into the less populous Class B frequencies.

Vocaline Company, the sole manufacturer of Class B equipment in 1957, recognized the consequences of these proposals for itself and its customers. Stricter emission controls on less efficient Class B stations would sharply raise retail prices on new equipment and would make existing Class B transceivers obsolete. An influx of eager, high-power commercial users would further lessen the reliability of lower-power Class B. The proposals, Vocaline argued, contradicted the FCC's original promise to provide a widely available, cheap radio service with minimum technical requirements. The minor problem of interference from Class B transceivers should be resolved by mutual cooperation among all licensees of a service in which frequencies were not exclusively awarded. Vocaline claimed sales of 2,000 transceivers a month to "small businesses, civic organizations, sportsmen and others." By late 1957, it had sold more than 20,000 such radios priced below \$100 apiece (23 Fed. Reg. 4784 [1958]).

Vocaline's protests were in vain. In June of 1958, the FCC issued a *Report and Order* which reallocated most of the 460-470 MHz band to the Industrial radio services. The Commission found that the 6,000 licensees of 115,000 transmitters in the Special Industrial Radio Service were of "higher priority" than the users of approximately 21,000 Class B radios (23 Fed. Reg. 4784 [1958]). The Commission would permit Class B stations to operate on their old frequencies for a limited period, but at half their previously allowed power, and with new frequency tolerance restrictions. Class B users were warned not to count on the continued existence of their service. The Commission, it appears, felt that Class B users operated their stations mostly for non-productive purposes and could not be preferred over taxicab and telephone repair services.

Although the FCC had decided to sacrifice the equipment and investment of Class B users and manufacturers, and to protect and extend the interests of industrial users and manufacturers in the 460-470 MHz range, it did not give up the idea of a personal Citizens' radio service.

In an August 1958 *Report and Order*, the Commission created a new Class D "for personal use by any individual," which it especially recommended to those Class A users who would not eventually qualify for industrial reassignment. Conceding that radio equipment which made efficient use of spectrum space could be manufactured cheaply for personal use only at lower frequencies, the

Commission reallocated 23 channels between 26.96 MHz and 27.23 MHz from the amateur hobby band to the new Class D (42 FCC 874 [1958]). According to the FCC, the amateurs had made little use of these frequencies.

The amateurs vigorously protested that this was the only portion of the spectrum suitable for their experimental broadcasting, and pointed out that certain propagation characteristics of this band which made it useful for long-distance experimental communication would create severe interference in the short-distance Citizens' service. During the peak period of each 11-year sunspot cycle, signals in this range—even those from very low-power stations—would be tossed thousands of miles, bouncing and reflecting erratically off the ionosphere. The hams warned that each of the 23 channels would become a continental party line (42 FCC 874 [1958]). The hams were ignored. For a second time the FCC's lack of engineering foresight had led to a fundamental error in its disposition of the Citizens' service. Its first error had been to assign the service to such a high frequency that reasonably priced equipment could not be made for individual use. Now the Commission had seriously misjudged the disruptive effects of the sunspot cycle.

Less than a year after Class D had been established, the FCC expressed concern about "improper communications," which were increasing with the number of licensed operators (12). Partly because the 27 MHz band had been an amateur hobby band, partly because of the deliberately misleading advertising of some manufacturers, and partly because of the loose wording of the Commission's regulations, many operators seemed to believe that Class D was mainly for hobby communication—for fun. The FCC, however, had intended to limit it to "substantive and useful messages related to either the business activities or personal convenience of private citizens" (44B FCC 1920 [1960]). To discourage improper communications, the agency ruled in 1960 that transmissions were to be no more than five minutes long and must be followed by two minutes of silence. By 1964 the FCC had even issued a list of specifically prohibited "hobby-type" expressions and messages compiled from transcriptions of conversations commonly heard all over the band (38 FCC 1238 [1965]).

The Commission felt that hobby communication would load the Citizens' Band with a volume of traffic far exceeding its capacity (38 FCC 1255 [1965]).

Users and manufacturers, however, experimented from the beginning with schemes to promote orderly hobby communication in the Class D band. Proposals

were aired in the hobby press to establish special calling channels for radio operators in boats and automobiles (3). These proposals ran counter to the FCC's conception of the band in two important ways. First, FCC policy prohibited reservation of any part of the band for special functions or groups of users. Besides the objection to privileged use of a free radio resource, the designation of special frequencies might someday become the basis of a claim to statutory protection. Second, these proposals encouraged inter-station communication. The FCC had expected transmission to take place mainly between different units of the same station license. A dry-cleaner would talk to his/her own fleet of delivery trucks, or an explorer would get the weather report from base camp. The informal proposals multiplied opportunities for unknown stations to exchange signals.

We do not know how much Class B operation was inter-station, but it can safely be assumed that "rag-chewing" and "hamming" prevailed in Class D from the start. The first of many petitions to change the rules limiting permissible communications was filed with the FCC within 18 months after the opening of the band (42 FCC 1040 [1960]). Expensive industrial equipment for multi-unit stations never had a significant market in the service. By late 1960 the most widely sold CB rig was a vacuum tube base station for personal use in house or car. Single-channel \$40 transceivers of this type were technically as reliable as 23-channel \$200 models (3).

Whereas the old Class B service had required at least a moderate amount of electronic expertise and money, Class D did not. In June of 1960, the FCC reported that the once starved Citizens' service bulged with 126,000 stations and 441,000 transmitters, and that "the mushrooming Citizens service accounts for most of the special radio group's workload and headaches during the year" (13). Since equipment could be purchased without a license, and since the popularity of the band had created an administrative backlog that caused greater and greater delays between application and licensing, unlicensed users with fully installed stations found illegal operation difficult to resist.

On behalf of the growing number of Citizens' operators in trucks and automobiles, Vocaline Company, now a Class D manufacturer, pressed the FCC to clarify its rule forbidding "any transmission designed to elicit a response from random or unknown stations." The FCC replied that transmission might be directed to unknown motels, gas stations, or garages within limited areas so long as the transmission was "adequately specific to indicate the station or stations desired" (3). The reasonableness of this ruling did not ease the Commission's

mounting enforcement problems, however, since it took another step towards inter-station communication, the goal sought by more and more operators.

Most early Class D operators used proper frequencies, generally observed time and power limits, and refrained from blatantly illegal practices such as the use of obscene language.

But old-timers in the band recall that a large group addressed most of their transmissions to other stations in the early 1960s, and that these transmissions only bordered on the Commission's guidelines for proper content. A discussion about where to meet for a few beers, or a conversation about the best fishing spots in another state are both examples of legitimate personal use which could not easily be distinguished from hobby communication. It was this elusive distinction between personal and hobby use, so difficult to fix in printed rules, that the FCC found harder and harder to maintain.

Operators also used nicknames or "handles" in place of call signs, especially for deliberate "skip" operation. The FCC had hoped that its 150-mile groundwave restriction on the range of Class D transmission would discourage illegal efforts to achieve long-distance communication by bouncing signals off the ionosphere, but increasing sunspot activity made even unintentional "skywave" operation unavoidable. A CB user could hear calls from all over the country and even from abroad on a set no larger than a table radio. Under these circumstances, the thrill of communicating several thousand miles often outweighed concern for regulations.

By 1961, the Citizens' Band was the fastest growing of all the radio services. In that year 80,000 new stations brought the number of licensed stations to 206,000 and the number of licensed transmitters to 657,000 (14). The yachtsmen and physicians once regarded by the FCC as the beneficiaries of the Citizens' service were represented by some users, but blue-collar operators flocked to the CB airways in greatest number, inventing and using a special jargon of Southern dialect, ham radio terms, and the police 10-code.

The Commission also issued more than 1,500 rule violations to Citizens' service users in 1961, and brought the first prosecution for indecent language against a Class D licensee (14). Token monthly fines did not scare very many potential lawbreakers, but inadequate funding and manpower resources made more effective FCC enforcement impossible. Frustrated by the indifference of so many users to basic rules, the Commission proposed new ones late in 1962 to

clarify permissible uses of Citizens' radio. More than 3,000 postcards, letters, and statements were received from individuals and citizens groups like the Ozark Five-Watters of Fayetteville and the 14W Association of Seattle, and from industry interests like Nunamaker Electronics and *Horizons* magazine (27 Fed. Reg. 11500 [1962]; 15). A large number of these requested more permissive rules, but the FCC dismissed all such proposals as being not in the public interest, convenience, or necessity (42 FCC 1195 [1964]).

Instead, the FCC sought to make inter-station calling more difficult and intra-station calling more attractive by removing all time limits on the latter and lengthening the mandatory silence period for the former. The FCC also prohibited inter-station calling on all but seven of the 23 available channels. These seven were lumped together in the middle of the band where most interference from industrial, medical, and scientific equipment occurred. This arrangement was described as a new control and limitation on inter-station signals. In practice it authorized and organized such communication. Indeed, the FCC had proposed to limit inter-station calling to five channels but yielded to pressure to allow seven in the final rule making. The FCC also agreed that channels 9 and 11 should logically be among those assigned to inter-station use since these channels already were used nationwide as calling frequencies.

In March of 1964, the FCC tried to curb the growth of the service by adopting a license application fee. After a brief drop, the number of applications was soon back to its old level of about 25,000 per month and rising rapidly (42 FCC 1195 [1964]). The license fee (which the Supreme Court struck down in December, 1976) had backfired in a more serious way, however. Instead of checking the growth of the service, it had encouraged the proliferation of unlicensed users over whom the FCC had no jurisdiction. These lawbreakers were the responsibility of the FBI, which had little ambition to track them down. From this date the real growth of the service was no longer indicated by license statistics.

As abuses multiplied, the FCC began publicly to blame Class D equipment manufacturers.

In 1964, CB had been a \$50-million-a-year business which included the manufacture of sets, antennas, microphones, "how-to" books and hobby magazines (42 FCC 1195 [1964]). By 1966, CB represented a \$300-million-a-year market (20). Electronic equipment chain stores which had been built to tap the

stereo hi-fi market in metropolitan areas across the country were now expanding into rural cities and towns to sell CB equipment. Both mail order and electronic equipment houses distributed promotional literature which advertised the fun of operation, and hobby equipment with features which resembled those on ham gear but were completely superfluous for legal operation of CB.

Manufacturers had also sponsored various programs to foster the use of CB radio. One of the largest, Hallicrafters, had sponsored REACT (Radio Emergency Associated Citizens Teams), which offered voluntary radio assistance for conventions, civic affairs, motorists in distress, and in natural disasters. In 1969, its 40,000 members were picked up by a new sponsor, General Motors Research Laboratories (18). As illegal operation and congestion increased in the Citizens' Band and spilled over into neighboring industrial service frequencies, these civic demonstrations did not mollify the FCC. In February of 1967, the agency called 75 representatives of the major manufacturers to Washington, charged them with most of the responsibility for operators' lack of respect for Class D rules, and threatened to impose strict and costly controls on the manufacture of CB sets and equipment.

The manufacturers were defiant. Summing up their point of view, *Popular Electronics* blamed the FCC's poor planning record and "appalling disinterest in the wants and desires of hundreds of thousands of the very citizens it supposedly represents" for the CB "mess" (6). *Popular Electronics* and others urged the agency to move small business users to a band of their own, since only one-tenth of the 800,000 Citizens' licenses now belonged to this group. Things had come full circle from the old Class A and B days. Individual operators and manufacturers were now demanding the removal of business operators so that the "true" Citizens' service could go its own way, hobby operation and all.

The FCC also faced a string of challenges to its authority in the courts. But here it was almost invulnerable. An appeal for judicial review of the 1964 rules, for example, had charged that they abridged free speech. The Second Circuit Court of Appeals reaffirmed the Commission's authority to prescribe uses for each class of radio service, as established in the Communications Act (*California Citizens Band Association v. United States of America and the Federal Communications Commission*, 375 F. 2d 43 [1967]; 16).

Threats and name-calling gradually gave way in the late 1960s to a period of accommodation between the FCC and a few manufacturers who had begun to dominate the market. In the cause of maintaining their position against weaker competitors, these manufacturers exhibited a new spirit of cooperation with the

FCC and expressed support for technical changes the Commission hoped would help ease congestion (32 Fed. Reg. 3105 [1967]). In return, the FCC seemed less determined to penalize hobby use of the service. The conciliatory posture of the agency was clearest in the sweeping rule revisions it proposed in July, 1974, after the oil crisis debacle had demonstrated its powerlessness to control nearly one million Class D license-holders and several million more unlicensed operators. For the first time the FCC did not declare that its main objective was to preserve the integrity of the Citizens' service under the 1958 rules, but that:

Our view is to eliminate unnecessary rules, to simplify others, and to reinforce and improve the basic structure of the service so that it will meet the intended purpose of a two-way radio communications service for individual United States Citizens (47 FCC 2d 1022 [1974]).

Instead of trying to mold the citizens to the service, the FCC now seemed ready to mold the service to the citizens.

The Commission made its first gesture early in 1970 by designating an exclusive motorist-in-distress channel (22 FCC 2d 635 [1970]). Nor were the new equipment specifications issued by the Commission in 1973 the punitive controls promised in 1967. Instead of imposing new standards on manufacturers, the agency instructed all licensees to operate sets meeting its requirements by November, 1978 (43 FCC 2d 375 [1973]). The major new requirement was the addition of modulation limiters to all units. The variety of legal uses for radio equipment had prevented the Commission from legislating against the manufacture of hobby frills like meters, squelch controls, and earphone jacks. But by making compliance the responsibility of licensees instead of the responsibility of manufacturers and retailers, the new rules encouraged operators to buy and use gear that did not meet FCC requirements, especially cheaper foreign radios that many hobby houses began to import for sale in great quantity. A user might purchase a regulation transmitter and apply for a license, or might purchase a cheaper transceiver complete with hobby frills and operate it without a license. Mobile operation and the use of an anonymous "handle" made the chances of being caught small.

Relaxation of the rules accompanied the development of a runaway CB market.

Total retail sales of more than \$400 million in 1974 are said to have exceeded \$1 billion in 1975. Midwestern state troopers estimated in late 1975 that one out of every four cars and three out of every four long-haul trucks on their highways were equipped with CB gear. Citizens' Band also had found a use in farm operation. Manufacturers estimated that while only one in every 28 American families had a CB radio in 1975, one in each 15 farm families owned at least one unit (22).

Rising demand created supply shortages. The American manufacturer, E. F. Johnson, had a backlog of orders for more than \$30 million by late 1974. Johnson, which took the lead in individual CB sales from the importers after President Nixon imposed a 10 percent surcharge in 1971, distributes its products through six recreational vehicle makers, most of Union 76 Oil's 750 truck stops, the 3,500 auto dealerships of American Motors, Sears, Midas Muffler, and Western Auto stores (25). In spite of Johnson's individual sales lead, Japanese manufacturers as a group controlled an estimated 90 percent of the American CB market during most of 1976. In 1975, Japanese firms exported more than four million units to U.S. distributors. More than twelve million Japanese units valued at \$634 million were exported during the first nine months of 1976 (4). Tighter technical standards on 40-channel sets have raised manufacturing costs too high for the smaller of the 100-odd Japanese producers, however, and market control will probably shift to American manufacturers. Eyeing this profit horizon are RCA, General Electric and Panasonic, which have the power to upset the existing U.S. market structure with lower prices and wider distribution. In 1975, 36 nervous importers and distributors organized the Communications Equipment Distributors Association in anticipation of this development (2).

The Commission had at last achieved a tacit agreement with the industry about the use of the Citizens' service by a mass public.

In its 1974 proposal to double the CB spectrum, the FCC promised to designate 30 channels expressly for inter-station calling (47 FCC 2d 1022 [1974]). The prospects for the heavyweight electronics firms looked brighter than ever. While other companies were forced to re-tool production and sell off old 23-channel stocks, the giants could enter the market with spanking new 40-channel rigs.

In August of 1975, the Commission began to implement its new proposals (40 Fed. Reg. 33667 [1975]). Although hobby use was not explicitly permitted, the

prohibition against it was deleted. Handles might be used if accompanied by call signs. The FCC announced that the new focus of its enforcement effort would be directed against unlicensed and out-of-band operation, obscenity, and malicious interference.

The CB boom is often attributed to the popularization of CB radio by independent truckers during the 1973 oil crisis. For the FCC, however, 1973 was simply another year of regulatory headache. In April, months before the oil crisis, the agency's Field Engineering Bureau announced that unlicensed CB operation was its biggest problem (5). Thirty engineers were sent across the country to track down violators who were charged with offenses carrying prison terms and fines of up to \$10,000. One citizens' group, the United CBer's of America, was charged with distributing counterfeit FCC licenses, making false statements to the Commission, and mail fraud.

By the time of the oil crisis, the world's "largest, chattiest party line" had an estimated seven million users, and about four million licensed transmitters (1). The new mass which overran the airways was not easily assimilated by local CB communities which had been in existence for years. These experienced operators monitored customary channels and traded bits of conversation with the "usuals" on their channel as they drove to work, ironed clothes, or watched television. Occasionally they ventured to a different channel to call an acquaintance in another town or part of the city. Group members informally policed their own channels to discourage obscenity and malicious interference. Other regulations were ignored when they conflicted with informally developed and mutually observed customs on local channels. Within the local frame of reference, communication was orderly. The use of handles was more personal for most operators and reflected their lifestyles. In the early 1970s, handles like Plumber, Crowbar, Janitor, and Slim Jim characteristically referred to the occupations of their owners and evidenced the blue-collar majority among users. Handles evoking a middle-class leisure-oriented lifestyle, like Beachcomber, Sky Pilot, and Tennis Bum, began to appear with the rush of novices to the band.

These new operators were nomadic travelers who had mastered the jargon and etiquette for successful operation, but lacked a CB identity built on a particular locality or group. The mass popularity of CB did not create a national "community" of the road, as manufacturers have claimed, but disrupted local-channel groups for whom CB had been a focus of everyday shared experiences, personal interests, and social occasions. By virtue of their growing numbers that

crowded all frequencies and generated continuous interference, the new band of wandering operators using the radio mainly for thrills threatened to break up older established communities of users.

Since many of these newcomers operate from automobiles, the stereotyped image of CB users as truckers, the only stable CB community on tire road, is understandable.

Outsiders are fascinated by the truckers' own adaptation of the older CB argot and its alliteration, rhythm, economy of expression, and concrete, imaginative terms. This distinctive language is a kind of secret code which pokes fun at the establishment way of doing things and reflects the truck driver's more uncompromising individuality in a society where regimented and impersonal authority is a common experience. Defiance of authority splashed the Citizens' Band into the headlines in the first place and made heroes of the truckers, who have only marginal social acceptance in the majority culture. In spite of a vicarious delight in this allegedly more virile and heroic world, however, the highway pretender in his/her hermetically sealed automobile is safely insulated from participation in the authentic world of the truck driver.

The truckers may well have the cultural resilience to resist the trivializing assault on their special traditions by these outsiders and by the mass media spotlight. For the stationary, established communities of users, however, the future is more problematic. Once a medium for enhancing community life, CB is fast acquiring an impersonal character more appropriate to the city, in which a lack of concern for the rights and feelings of other operators is more and more common.

The FCC originally desired a privatized Citizens' service for communication within the individual household or small business.

This individualism was balanced by a notion of collective responsibility, which acknowledged that only regulated self-restraint could make Citizens' radio, a limited resource, freely available to all. Roughly 20 million operators have shown that the pattern of communication between people is anything but privatized. If the pattern of communication is comradely and not restricted to the family or commercial unit, a new kind of individualism has appeared in the selfish manner in which many operators conduct their conversations on the Citizens'

Band. That selfishness has been encouraged by the manufacturers who profit from it.

Popular belief has it that the citizens have wrested from a stuffy Commission the freedom to use their service as they please. Imaginative operators have indeed gone far beyond the original proposals of the FCC in inventing uses for the band. Lovers use CB for sweet talk; hitch-hikers call around town for rides on it; politicians use it to chat with their constituencies; evangelists distribute comfort and Bibles with it; mobile operators help police spot drunken drivers and stolen cars. It remains to be seen whether uncontrolled congestion will make the Citizens' Band unuseable, whether television and stereo owners will have to pay more for equipment to filter out CB noise, whether ham operators, who have been excellent stewards of their own frequencies, will have to give up more and more space to the Citizens' Band. If manufacturers' and citizens' desires seem to coincide for the moment, the history of the service shows that the shifting coincidence of interest among citizens, industry, and government has been full of surprises.

Note:

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